

SEVENTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION  
AND MANAGEMENT OF THE POLLOCK RESOURCES IN THE CENTRAL BERING SEA

REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE  
SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

September 16-18, 2002  
Moscow, Russia

**Final corrected: 18 September 2002**

Delegations from the People's Republic of China (China), Japan, the Republic of Korea (Korea), the Republic of Poland (Poland), the Russian Federation (Russia), and the United States (U.S.) participated in a meeting of the Scientific and Technical (S&T) Committee in Moscow, Russia.

**1. Opening remarks**

Dr. Richard Marasco (U.S.), Chair of the Scientific and Technical Committee, opened the meeting at 14:10, 16 September 2002. The meeting agenda and a list of the participants are provided in Attachments 1 and 2.

**2. Appointment of Rapporteur.**

LCDR Phillip Thorne (U.S.) was appointed as rapporteur.

**3. Adoption of Agenda**

The Agenda was adopted (Attachment 1).

**4. Discussion of Scientific Issues**

**4.1. Update Catch and Effort Statistics.**

4.1.1 In fulfilling the recommendation of the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, Japan and Korea provided documents that present the historical data of Pollock fishing in the Central Bering Sea during the period 1984-1991 (Attachments 3 & 4) The United States noted that data from Russia and China remains outstanding. China and Russia stated that they would supply the necessary data.

4.1.2 The United States raised the issue of where the data is to be archived and whether the data should be considered public. The United States recommended development of a website with password protection and data archival, if parties wish it protected. The matter was deferred for parties to consider and be re-addressed under agenda item 6, "Other Matters and Recommendations".

**4.2. Year 2001-2002 Results of Trial Fishing**

4.2.1 Korea requested clarification on the reporting period for trial fishing. To remain consistent with reports from previous years, the reporting period was determined to be from the last conference to the present conference (year 2001-2002).

4.2.2 China reported two vessels were sent to the Donut Hole from 11-14 November 2001 for trial fishing and reported no catch or location of pollock. However, the scale of trial fishing was

not sufficient to produce good results.

4.2.3 There was no trial fishing conducted by any other parties since the last meeting.

4.2.4 China reported they may conduct trial fishing in Nov/Dec 2002, and will report their intentions to the U.S. Coast Guard.

#### 4.3. Review Results of 2001/2002 Research Cruises

4.3.1. The United States reported on the winter surveys conducted by the R/V Miller Freeman from 18 Feb – 11 Mar in the Bogoslof I. (BI) and Eastern Bering Sea (EBS) areas in cooperation with the Japanese R/V Kaiyo Maru 9 Feb – 5 Mar. In the BI area there was 227,000 mt and in the EBS there were 1,355,000 mt of pollock. Results of the data were shared with all parties (Attachment 5).

4.3.2. Japan reported on the winter Echo Integration Mid-Water Trawl (EIMWT) survey conducted by the R/V Kaiyo Maru 9 Feb – 5 Mar in the U.S. EEZ. (Attachment 6)

4.3.3. The United States noted the pollock biomass estimate by Japan of 181,000 mt was very close to the R/V Miller Freeman's estimate of 227,000 mt. The lower biomass estimate from the R/V Kaiyo Maru's survey can be attributed to the survey occurring earlier in the year.

4.3.4. Russia reported on the status of Bering Sea pollock stocks in the Russian EEZ. 10 scientific cruises were made to the northern and northwestern Bering Sea in 2001 and first half of 2002. Pollock stocks in the northern and northwestern parts of the Bering Sea have stabilized at a low level. The low abundance of the West Bering Sea and Navarin stocks will prevent pollock from extending into the Aleutian and Commander basins in any large numbers in 2003. Results of the data were shared with all parties (Attachment 7).

4.3.5. In answering the question posed by the United States, Russia reported that the exploitation rate on the Navarin basin pollock stocks is less than 30%.

4.3.6. The United States presented a summary of the preliminary results of the 2002 Summer EBS survey. On the EBS shelf, 3.6 mmt of pollock was estimated in the pelagic zone (surface to 3 meters from sea floor), and 4.8 mmt were found in the demersal zone (within 3 meters of the sea floor). Detailed data on the survey will be distributed to all Parties.

4.3.7. Korea asked the United States how they account for the survey error bias involved with "double counting" pollock that migrates during the survey. The United States responded that the survey is conducted during a period where it is thought that migration is minimal, but that the migration issue is one that needs to be considered.

#### 4.4. Review the Status of Aleutian Basin Pollock Stocks.

4.4.1. United States reported there is no reliable biomass estimate for pollock in the Aleutian basin as defined as sea areas beyond 500 meters. No survey in the Aleutian region has been conducted in 2002, the most recent was completed in 2000. A survey of the Bogoslof Island area (Convention Specific Area) was completed in March 2002. Therefore the use of the Bogoslof I. biomass as a proxy is appropriate, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention.

4.4.2. Korea suggested that there is insufficient data to independently estimate the biomass of Aleutian Basin pollock stock, and an indirect method would be necessary. Furthermore, continuous efforts like comprehensive surveys were recommended to estimate the Aleutian

Basin Pollock biomass, and an intersessional workshop would be needed to plan that effort.

#### 4.5. Factors Affecting Recovery of the Stock

- 4.5.1. China addressed a question to the United States delegation about the possible relationship between the harvest of 1.2 million tons of pollock each year in the EBS and the continued absence of any pollock in the Convention Area. The biomass of Pollock in the EBS remains steady while US continues fishing effort, but in the Convention area there has been a 10 year moratorium but the Pollock biomass decreases. China would like a reasonable explanation for this phenomena. The United States replied that although for management purposes pollock are managed as one stock on the EBS, there may be more than one discrete stock found there, and that there are different pollock spawning areas in the EBS at different times. Furthermore, the path and manner of pollock migration is not fully understood. U.S. research surveys of the outer EBS shelf and slope have documented the presence of very few pollock, indicating that there does not appear to be a mass migration of EBS stocks into the Aleutian Basin. The United States believes the Bogoslof stock is closely tied to the Aleutian Basin stock, and the United States has not fished the Bogoslof region for pollock since 1991. The Aleutian Island stock is also possibly closely tied to the Aleutian Basin stock, and the United States has not fished this region for pollock since 1998.
- 4.5.2. Japan expressed interest in an explanation by United States and Russia of pollock management measures in their respective EEZs. The United States. response is summarized in page 6 of attachment 5, and section 4.5.1 of this report. Russia reported taking similar management measures as the United States, primarily establishing fishing moratoria on areas where stocks are scarce and reduced fishing pressure where stocks are depressed. Furthermore, measures have been taken to close areas with high abundance of juvenile pollock, and insertion of square mesh lining in intermedia to reduce the catch of juvenile pollock. Mesh size limits of 110 mm's in codends have also been implemented. Finally, there has been a complete ban on pollock fishing in the Russian EEZ during periods of pollock spawning. In 2002 this closure was 01 March – 15 May.
- 4.5.3. Considering the frequent questions on measures of the coastal states, Korea recommended the United States and Russia draft a summary report of management measures implemented in respective EEZs as an appendix to the committee report.
- 4.5.4. The Chairman proposed that the coastal states each prepare a paper describing management measures taken as appendixes to the meeting report for the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference. The United States and Russia agreed to provide these reports. These reports will be forwarded to all Parties by 01 January 2003.
- 4.5.5. The Chairman noted while several workshops have been conducted in the past, and these workshops were conducted to examine the issue of factors affecting the recovery of pollock stocks, we are still in a position of not having these factors definitively identified. The delegations at this meeting concluded that it is time to explore with more detail and depth possibly at another scheduled workshop.

#### 4.6. The Effects of the Moratorium and its Continuation

- 4.6.1 Russia stated that it has detected the first signs of recovery of pollock stocks in a location off of Cape Olutorskiy in the Western Bering Sea. This is the first time this band of pollock stock has been detected in 10 years and likely can be attributed to the moratorium on fishing in the Convention Area and sound management policies implemented by the State Fisheries Committee of Russia. Additionally, in 1993, fishing for pollock was prohibited for 30 nm around the Commander Islands. A survey of pollock egg levels in 2001 indicated a large

increase in pollock stocks since the 1980s.

4.6.2 Korea questioned the appearance of the Pollock band off Cape Olutorskiy in the WBS as a positive sign of the effect of moratorium in the donut hole.

4.7. Methodologies to Determine Allowable Harvest Level (AHL)

4.7.1. Japan suggested establishing AHL in any circumstance, even if very small, and based on scientific foundation. These calculations are based on United States' method of establishing ABC. Japan provided calculations for a conservative ABC estimate of 2,336 mt in the Specific Area and 3,894 mt in the whole Aleutian Basin Area for 2003. This calculation reflects the same methodology proposed by Japan for the past 3 years and the situation of the Pollock stock being severely depressed. ( See attachment 8).

4.7.2. Poland questioned Japan on how to develop an AHL from the proposed ABC procedure. Japan stated AHL is indeed derived from the ABC, as part of a 2 step process. Japan wanted to first discuss the proposed ABC prior to discussing the determination of AHL.

4.7.3. The United States noted the Japanese proposal is similar to part of the process used by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) to reach Total Allowable Catches (TACs). There is, however, there is other input that the NPFMC uses to go from ABC to TACs, especially when considering stocks that are severely depressed and in need of rebuilding.

4.7.4. Japan believes that for the fishing countries, the moratorium in the CBS is devastating. There should be a way to accommodate the needs of both coastal countries and the fishing countries. That is why establishing the correct ABC's and then an AHL are very important issues.

4.7.5. Russia supports the position and comments presented by the United States.

4.7.6. Korea notes per the Convention, AHL can be established first by consensus, and if that fails, move to Part I (Article VII). If AHL is set by consensus, we need to set up methodology for setting AHL. Korea appreciated Japan for introducing the concept of ABC as one methodology of determining AHL when the AHL is set by consensus.

4.7.7. China notes the data is not good enough to support resumption of commercial harvests. China suggests that setting even a token AHL would give fisherman a little hope, even if it would not result in commercial fishing.

4.7.8. The United States proposed that the Japanese proposal for setting ABC, if adopted, should be flexible, and may be subject to future change.

4.7.9. Korea clarified its position that it supported the Japanese proposal for introducing the concept of ABC that can be applied as a prior step in determining AHL. However, it recommended that the number of ABC itself on the Japanese proposal might be improved in the future.

4.7.10. Japan proposes to establish AHL based on ABC figures. Japan stated that even if we do not go into commercial fishing, there should be AHL figures established.

4.7.11. The United States stated that method proposed by Japan to calculate ABC is an intermediate step to possibly be used to calculate AHL. In the future, Parties may come up with other proposed methodologies for calculating ABC. It may be appropriate that in the future Parties should submit methodologies to calculate ABC to all other Parties prior to an annual meeting

to give everyone time to consider the proposals.

- 4.7.12. The United States inquired of the Japanese delegation if they would like to discuss the setting of an AHL as part of the S&T Committee meeting or at the plenary meeting. Japan replied that the plenary meeting was the appropriate venue.
- 4.7.13. Korea stated that it does accept the Japanese proposal for the method of determining ABC as one option. In addition, it would accept the number, 3.849t, as the ABC for this year if all Parties commit to reaching an AHL based on this ABC by consensus.
- 4.7.14. The Chairman confirmed with all Parties that they accepted the ABC proposed by the Japanese delegation for this year, and that the setting of the AHL would be deferred to the plenary session. The Chairman also recommended that the intersessional workshop discussed for 2003 be the appropriate venue to determine how ABC will be established in the future.

#### 4.8. Comprehensive Research Plan

- 4.8.1. Korea requested a review of the current status of the comprehensive research plan.
- 4.8.2. The United States provided an overview of the work of the comprehensive research workgroup that was formed in 1999 to coordinate and plan for research in calendar year 2002. Three nations had available vessel time (Russia, Japan, and the United States) for 2002 and agreed to coordinate their vessel days in planning research in the Bering Sea. Results of the workgroup were presented earlier in this meeting. The United States proposed to continue the working group, and inquired as to which parties have vessel time available to conduct research in the Bering Sea for 2003. The United States will make the dates of its research vessel availability to all parties in 2-3 months, and has invited all Parties to participate.
- 4.8.3. Korea inquired if the United States had plans to conduct research in the Bogoslof I area, the United States responded yes, the survey will be conducted in March 2003 and be similar to the survey conducted in 2002.
- 4.8.4. Korea anticipates that there is a high probability that it could send a research vessel and some trial fishing vessels to the Bering Sea in 2003 for research. Korea is willing to host an intersessional meeting to plan and coordinate that work.
- 4.8.5. Japan has no plans to send a research vessel into the Bering Sea in 2003.
- 4.8.6. Russia reported TINRO will conduct a hydroacoustic survey in Western Bering Sea in July 2003, and a bottom trawl survey in August 2003, and requested each Party to conduct plankton and physical oceanography data collection during their research.
- 4.8.7. Russia inquired of the United States delegation if it would be possible to conduct egg and larvae survey on the United States research vessel in the Bogoslof Island region in Feb 2003. The United States responded it was not aware of any plans for such a survey, but that pollock don't generally spawn in the BI area until at least mid March, so an egg count in late February or early March would not be productive.
- 4.8.8. The United States recommended the comprehensive research planning team develop sampling procedures for research within the Convention Area.
- 4.8.9. Poland does not plan to conduct trial fishing operations during 2003, but would like to participate in the R/V Miller Freeman cruise.

4.8.10. The Chairman suggested that due to the short time period that exists before already planned 2003 research cruises, Korea work with the comprehensive research team to integrate their survey activity directly with the United States for 2003. There is also a need for a comprehensive survey in the Convention Area, and this survey would be best planned in a workshop, which Korea has volunteered to host about in March 2003. Matters such as pollock genetics and aging, formulation of ABC/AHL, how to integrate trial fishing in research plans, and Pollock migration between the EBS and the Convention area should also be discussed at the workshop. Each party should forward a tentative agenda for the workshop to the Chairman prior to the end of November, and the Chairman will circulate the collated agenda to all Parties.

## **5. Discussion of Enforcement and Management Issues**

### **5.1. Trial Fishing Terms and Conditions for 2003.**

- 5.1.1. China noted that no fish were found during its trial fishing effort in 2001, and that this is primarily due to the short period of fishing and the participation of only two vessels. An increase in the number of trial fishing vessels each country could utilize and/or the coordination of trial fishing by vessels for more than one country could result in more effective fishing. China believes that trial fishing can be an effective part of scientific research.
- 5.1.2. The United States presented an enforcement report on trial fishing in the Convention Area for 2001/2002 (attachment 9). The United States also distributed a letter to all Parties that requested cooperation by them in allowing their trial fishing VMS data to be accessed by the U.S. Coast Guard.
- 5.1.3. The Chairman noted with respect to trial fishing, there seemed to be 3 issues that need to be discussed: (1) the number of vessels permitted to trial fish, (2) the time frame for trial fishing, and (3) integration of trial fishing with research surveys.
- 5.1.4. Korea proposed that the right to send trial fishing vessels into the Convention Area should be transferable between Parties, with the total allowable number of trial fishing vessels allowed each month to remain at 12. Korea believes that this will make trial fishing more effective, and will make the willingness of Korean fishing companies to send their vessels to the Convention Area stronger. Korea believes that the Parties can leverage this private investment towards exploration into receiving more scientific data on Pollock stocks in the Convention Area.
- 5.1.5. The United States will not support a request for more than 2 trial fishing vessels per month in the Convention area from any Party, or the transfer of a Parties' trial fishing rights to any other Party, for the reasons it had stated in past annual meetings.
- 5.1.6. Poland commented that the current conditions of trial fishing is sufficient now, and that issues of sharing trial fishing rights with other Parties should be discussed at a workshop. Two trial fishing vessels for each Party is enough.
- 5.1.7. The United States (as chair of the comprehensive research working group) states that the group did not discuss the issue of trial fishing as part of a cooperative survey because there was no interest by any Party in trial fishing in 2001/2002.
- 5.1.8. The Chairman proposed including trial fishing in the agenda for the next comprehensive research working group meeting, and stated the issue of integrating trial fishing into a research plan is very complicated and requires significant prior planning.

5.1.9. The Chairman proposed making the terms and conditions for 2003 trial fishing the same as those for 2002. All Parties agreed.

5.2. Number and priority Placement of Observers Required by Article XI

No issues noted.

5.3. Methods to Determine Catch Weight

No issues noted.

5.4. Components of a Management System

No issues noted.

**6. Other Matters and Recommendations**

6.1. The United States has put a small amount of information (reports from 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> annual meetings) on it's NOAA regional website as a demonstration of what can be done if all Parties agree to support a website. The United States provided a demonstration page on page 14 of Appendix 5 of what a more robust website could contain. The United States will continue to develop the website if all Parties agree. The United States will consult with Parties on information to have on the website, and password protected information that Parties would like to have available, but not to the public. The alternative is for all Parties to have independent websites.

6.2. Korea addressed advantage of website – a common method of modern communication, an effective way to coordinate activities, and a useful means of preserving Conference history. Many fisheries organizations use websites to communicate and share information and announcements. Issues that need to be discussed include how to organize the structure of the website, and the need for funds to maintain and update the website.

6.3. Japan inquired if the website will be made public so others may access the information. The United States replied that some information is already made public, however some information should not be made public. The United States reiterated that it believes no sensitive information should be made public unless all Parties agree. It would like to continue to develop the website, correspond via e-mail over the next year on appropriate website material, and re-visit the website at the next annual meeting.

6.4. The Chairman stated that in order to coordinate the website work of the United States, the United States would issue a password to each Party that will enable access to the demonstration web site. Parties can access that website and provide comments on improving it to the United States.

#### **6.4 List of Attachments**

1. S&T Agenda
2. List of S&T participants
3. Japan catches of Pollock in Donut Hole area of the Bering Sea during 1984-1991
4. Korean catches of Pollock in Donut Hole area of the Bering Sea during 1984-1991
5. Information submitted to the S&T committee by the United States party for the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference.
6. Cruise results of the winter 2002 Bering Sea Pollock survey (Kaiyo Maru)
7. Status of Bering Sea Pollock in the Russian EEZ
8. Japanese proposal for the ABC of 2003 in the Convention Area
9. U.S. Coast Guard report on Donut Hole Activity 2001-2002
10. Hydroacoustic surveys of the Bering Sea walleye Pollock



## **Attachment 1 Agenda for the Scientific and Technical Committee**

1. Opening Remarks
2. Appointment of Rapporteur
3. Adoption of Agenda
4. Discussion of Science Issues:
  - 4.1 Update catch and effort statistics
  - 4.2 Year 2001/2002 Results of Trial Fishing
  - 4.3 Review Results of 2001/2002 Research Cruises
  - 4.4 Review the Status of Aleutian Basin Pollock Stocks
  - 4.5 Factors Affecting Recovery of the Stock
  - 4.6 The Effects of the Moratorium and its Continuation
  - 4.7 Methodologies to Determine Allowable Harvest Levels (AHL)
  - 4.8 Comprehensive Research Plan
5. Discussion of Enforcement and Management Issues
  - 5.1 Trial Fishing Terms and Conditions for 2003
  - 5.2 Number and Priority Placement of Observers Required by Article XI
  - 5.3 Methods to Determine Catch Weight
  - 5.4 Components and Recommendations
6. Other Matters and Recommendation
7. Report to the Annual Conference
8. Closing Remarks